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1 April 1954

THE MILITARY SITUATION IN INDOCHINA

The long-awaited second mass assault on Dien Bien Phu began on the night of 30 March when Viet Minh forces hit strongpoints Dominique, Eliane and Huguette. The assault was preceded by a softening up of French positions by intense artillery and mortar fire.

Waves of enemy troops from all three regiments of ^{one} Division ~~312~~ took three out of five sub-positions in strongpoint Dominique in a few hours. Two of Eliane's four positions fell to two regiments of ^{second} Division ~~312~~.

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Huguette also came under attack when elements of Division ^{a third} ~~398~~ unsuccessfully attempted to overrun French positions there. The French attempted a diversionary sortie north from Isabelle, their southernmost strongpoint, with tanks and infantry but were forced back by threat of enemy encirclement.

Reports received this morning state that counterattacks by French units have succeeded in retaking several of the lost sub-positions. Slightly more than half of both Dominique and Eliane are now in French hands. These two strongpoints command the high ground overlooking the rest of the main defense system and are considered by our army attaché essential to the holding of the total complex.

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The expected attack by Division 308 against the western French 25X1X6a positions failed to materialize last night. [REDACTED]

25X1X6 [REDACTED] this may have been called off because enemy plans possibly call for the taking of Eliane first.

The French lost up to two African battalions in the initial attack on Dominique and Eliane and Vietnamese paratroops suffered heavy losses while counterattacking. One Thai unit abandoned positions prior to or early in the attack. The French high command has announced a tentative estimate of 2,000 Viet Minh killed. This suggests a total Viet Minh casualty figure of more than 8,000.

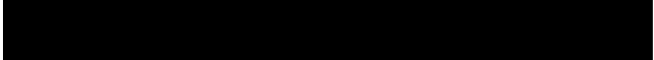
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Aerial photos of the Viet Minh system show it had approached to within 50 yards of the central redoubt and virtually encircled Isabelle. These preparations were on a far greater scale than those at Gabrielle and Beatrice prior to the enemy's successful attacks there.

25X6A

 many of 3,000 recently arrived Viet Minh reinforcements are suffering from malaria. About 13,000 additional enemy troops are moving from the southwest and north of the Tonkin delta to reinforce at Dien Bien Phu. These are recent recruits which had been undergoing training. The larger group of 10,000 men supposedly started from Thanh Hoa and may make slow progress because of heavy rains. But the French estimate that the Viet Minh has sufficient food, ammunition and other supplies for prolonged operations against Dien Bien Phu.

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Just prior to the attack, the French reorganized some of their defenses and established several new strongpoints. These are called Epervier, Eliane 10, Eliane 12, and Junon. This move was calculated to give them greater depth of defense and also to confuse the enemy which uses mockups of French positions to train its troops intensively prior to battle.

Around the strongpoints the French had laid barbed wire belts 40 to 80 meters ^{*in depth.*} ~~wide~~. Additional belts of six to ten meters ~~wide~~ encircle individual positions within each strongpoint.

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General Navarre describes the situation as serious but not yet critical. All reserves at Dien Bien Phu have been committed. He is prepared to commit three additional paratroop battalions from the Tonkin delta if necessary. His total paratroop reserves in Indochina available for reinforcement amount to six battalions. One of the delta battalions is already scheduled for dropping. In addition, an artillery airdrop is planned to replace losses of 13 pieces. *De Costre*

The problem of evacuating French casualties from Dien Bien Phu appears insurmountable at this point. The airstrips are under constant enemy fire. Even before the current assault, a considerable backlog ^{of wounded} existed. The morale of Dien Bien Phu's defenders, who are operating in close proximity to the increasing number of wounded, is a serious

problem. Approved For Release 2000/05/30 : CIA-RDP80R01443R000200210003-5

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Poor weather conditions are hampering French offensive air action and resupply. A shortage of ammunition has already been reported and top priority has been placed on dropping additional quantities. Some drops have fallen in enemy hands.

A French Union force of about 5,000 troops is now engaged in a clearing mission in the valleys north of Luang Prabang. Although their primary mission is against Viet Minh guerrilla forces in this area, it is possible that some link-up could eventually be made with the defenders at Dien Bien Phu, or that enemy forces there would be sent to neutralize any threat to their rear.

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25X1X7

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Meanwhile, in the Tonkin delta, [REDACTED]

25X1X7

[REDACTED] all major Viet Minh units formerly outside the defense perimeter have now infiltrated. This brings Viet Minh regular strength there to an estimated 20,000, whereas several weeks ago it was in the neighborhood of 13,000. In addition, an estimated 55,000 irregular troops are there, whose quality and capabilities often approach those of the regulars.

The rail and highway communications between Haiphong and Hanoi have been a major target in recent weeks and the flow of supplies has frequently been disrupted. [REDACTED] anticipates a major 25X1X7 attempt on these facilities to coincide with the current attack on Dien Bien Phu. Ambushes of French Union troops are a daily routine, and these with other guerrilla and sabotage tactics are expected to increase.

25X1X7

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In central Laos, the French operation to clear and reoccupy areas recently overrun by the Viet Minh has resulted in little contact thus far. Operation "Atlante" in Central Vietnam is aimed at reoccupying the coastal strip which has been in Viet Minh hands since 1945. It is continuing with steady but unspectacular success. ~~Elsewhere in Indo china, the military picture is relatively quiet.~~

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